



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – May 2013

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project

- Construction of the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project is underway. Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation, out of Sonoma, is constructing the project. Preparation and planning is under way for construction of the remaining three habitat features of the demonstration project.
- Site identification, outreach to landowners, preliminary environmental studies and topographic surveys are underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA PWA, were selected to design the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. The 10% conceptual designs should be completed in April.
- Water Agency staff is working closely with the US Army Corps of Engineers on a Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project that should allow the Corps to contribute funding for a portion of the mile 2-3 phase of Dry Creek Habitat enhancement.

Fish Monitoring

Monitoring has begun for juvenile fish, with downstream migrant traps installed at Dry Creek, the Russian River at Mirabel, Mark West Creek, Dutch Bill Creek and Austin Creek. Traps are checked daily. Water Agency staff are regularly consulting with National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the status of the migration and plans for reservoir releases.

Tributary Habitat Enhancement Projects

Habitat monitoring was conducted in Grape Creek this fall, and won't be needed conducted again until 2015, per requirements of the Biological Opinion.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Bids for project construction were submitted on April 29, and are under review. The seismic upgrade project (not required by the Biological Opinion) is underway and should be completed in May (depending on weather). Major construction on the fish screen/fish ladder project is estimated to begin in summer 2014.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2014 Lagoon Management Period begins on May 15. Downstream migrant fish sampling is underway at Austin Creek and with an antenna at Duncans Mills that can read passive integrated transponders (PIT) tags. Biological and water quality monitoring, including fisheries and invertebrate sampling, begins at the end of May. Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing. The Estuary Management Project Community Meeting will be held on June 2 at the Monte Rio Community Center.

- Field investigations of the jetty have begun. Work was conducted in early March, including the installation of monitoring wells, and will resume in July after the harbor seal pupping season. The purpose of the studies is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in 2014.

Interim Flow Changes

To slow declines in Lake Mendocino, on December 19, the Water Agency petitioned the State Water Board to allow the Water Agency to use Lake Mendocino storage levels to determine water supply conditions in the upper river. On December 31st, the State Water Board issued the new TUC order granting the Water Agency's request. As of January 1, under the new TUC, the minimum flow in the upper Russian River is 25 cfs. The period of the order is January 1- June 29, 2014, although on March 7, the State Water Board amended the order to include new terms, including a drought action plan (submitted to the State Water Board on 3/28) and an update on activities on water use efficiency due October 31.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- The Water Agency is working with contractors through the Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: The Drought is on. Turn Water Off.
- A community meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 12 in Dry Creek.
- A community meeting will take place in Monte Rio on June 2 to discuss estuary activities this summer.



Juvenile Chinook salmon in the new backwater constructed on Dry Creek